

Extraordinary Wine Values From Southern Italy

Charles Scicolone (February 03, 2016)



Wine expert Charles Scicolone explains why Southern Italian wines have long been undervalued and not well known in the US. First, they are made from unusual grape varieties that are not recognized by most consumers. Second, most American tourists used to visit Northern and Central Italy and had little chance to sample these wines in the places they are made. The situation, however is changing as more and more customers are coming to realize that these are high quality wines—and they go very well with food!



Every year the Italian Trade Commission sponsors Italian Wine Week in New York City at the Midtown Hilton Hotel. For this year's Vino 2016, the spotlight will be on the regions of Calabria, Campania, Puglia and Sicily.

Why are these wines undervalued?

I was delighted to be asked to moderate a panel on "Extraordinary Wines Values from

Southern Italy." This topic is very interesting to me because I drink these wines often, have Southern Italian roots, and enjoy traveling in the region.

As a former retailer and wine director for an Italian restaurant in NYC which had a large collection of Southern Italian wines, I know firsthand that these wines are undervalued and not well known.

First, they are unfamiliar to most customers

Part of the reason for this is that they are made from unusual grape varieties that are not recognized by most consumers. Pallagrello, Coda di Volpe, and Gaglioppo, for example, are not the kinds of grapes that most consumers are familiar with, so they are reluctant to try the wines that are made from them.

Second, most American tourists still do not visit Southern Italy. Another reason the wines are not well known to American consumers is that most tourists visited Northern and Central Italy. But as interest in Southern Italian food and travel continues to expand, many consumers will have the chance to sample these wines in the places they are made and bring their new-found interest back home with them.

Southern Italian wines are a "hand sell"

These wines are what we in the business call a "hand sell," meaning that it often takes talking about these wines and explaining them to the customer in order to get them to try a bottle or two. They are high quality wines, which reflect the grapes they are made from and the terroir where the grapes are grown—and they go very well with food! When a customer in the restaurant asked for my recommendation, I would suggest a wine from Southern Italy. When they saw the "low" price, they often seemed surprised.

But I always felt a lot of satisfaction in knowing that I had made many of them into more educated wine drinkers and loyal fans of these wines. As they left the restaurant, they would thank me for my suggestion and would ask where to buy the wine at retail. So the situation is changing. And by bringing attention to these great wine values, the spotlight on Southern Italy during Vino 2016 is bound to have a definite impact on the American market as well.

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